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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MUMBAI 000518

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SUBJECT: WEB OF SUSPECTED TERRORISTS IN MALAGAON BOMBING COVERS THREE STATES AND IMPLICATES HINDU NATIONALIST GROUPS

REF: 08 Mumbai 120, 360, 364, 365, 405, 447

1. (SBU) Summary: The Maharashtra State Police Anti-Terrorism Squad arrested five people and charged them with murder and other related crimes in connection with the 2008 bombings in Malegaon, Maharashtra that killed six and wounded 89 others. The accused were picked up in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and in Maharashtra. Those arrested were identified as having ties to the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) youth wing in their earlier years, and two had ties to a recent addition to the Sangh Parivar family of Hindu nationalist organizations. The 2008 Malegaon blasts were distinguished from others attributed to Islamic terrorist organizations by their lack of sophistication and the use of military grade RDX explosives. This incident of suspected Hindu terrorism is causing headaches for the Hindu-nationalist, Bharatiya Janata Party in its election campaign in Madhya Pradesh where combating terrorism is one of its major campaign platforms. Overall, police are concerned about rising Hindu extremism, the improvement in Hindu radicals' bomb-making ability, and the connection of former military officers to the Malegaon blasts. End Summary

2. (U) From October 24 to 28 Mumbai's Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) arrested suspects in the September 2008 bombings in Malegaon, Maharashtra and Modasa, Gujarat who have ties to several Hindu extremist groups. Retired Army Major Ramesh Upadhyay, from Pune, Maharashtra, and Sameer Kulkarni, from Madhya Pradesh, were arrested October 28 in connection with the recent Malegaon bombings that killed six and wounded 89 others. They were charged with murder and attempted murder. Both are members of Abhinav Bharat, a militant Hindu group which advocates retaliatory terrorism against minority groups. The group's website, which advocated abandoning the Hindu principle of tolerance, "sahishnuwad" in favor of a proactive and aggressive Hindu nationalism, shut down on October 26 after Upadhyay and Kulkarni were detained for questioning. Kulkarni was arrested in Madhya Pradesh, in a house formerly occupied by sadhvi (ascetic) Pragya Singh Thakur, who was earlier arrested in Surat, Gujarat, in relation to the same Malegaon bombings. Thakur is said to have played a "key role" in the blasts; reports detailing the investigation indicate that the ATS traced the motorbike used in the Malegaon blasts to Thakur. Others arrested last week in relation to the Malegaon bombings include Shivanarain Kalsaangra, from Surat, Gujarat and Shyam Sahu, from Indore, Madhya Pradesh.

3. (U) Those arrested, now in their late 30s and early 40s reportedly were members of the BJP youth wing Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) in their earlier years and formed the organization Rashtriya Jagaran Manch in July of this year after Hindu-Muslim riots in Madhya Pradesh. Milind Marathe,

national deputy president of ABVP denies any connection between Thakur and his organization. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), another part of the Hindu nationalist family of organizations, claims that it has no links with the accused. Thakur was also rumored to be a former member of the Durga Vahini, the women's wing of the VHP. A court in Nashik authorized brain-mapping, narco-analysis and polygraph testing on Thakur.

Comparison to the other recent blasts attributed to Muslim radicals

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14. (SBU) According to media reports, the improvised explosive devices used in the Malegaon and Modasa blasts this year were of a crude design, signaling investigators that this was not the work of Islamic extremist groups like the Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) or the more recent Indian Mujahadeen. Investigators believe that bombs tied to those groups have been technically sophisticated. Bomb blasts in Ahmadabad in July and Delhi in September and bomb material seized in Surat all used multiple improvised explosive devices of the same basic design. (Ammonium Nitrate was the primary explosive in the Ahmadabad, Surat, and Delhi devices.) Both the Malegaon and Modasa bombings were single IED attacks versus the hallmark multiple IED attacks launched this past summer. The device used in the 2008 Malegaon bombing utilized military grade RDX which may have been stolen from the Indian Army. The main charge for the IED used in the Modasa blast consisted of gunpowder, suggesting that

MUMBAI 00000518 002 OF 003

bombs used in the Malegaon and Modasa attacks did not have a common bomb maker or designer. The use of military grade explosives in the Malegaon blasts clued investigators to look for existing military ties to the recent bombings.

16. (U) The arrest of Hindu extremists comes as a relief to some local Muslims who have felt that the police often arrest Muslim youth without cause in bombing cases. Abu Asim Azimi, chief of the Maharashtra Samajwadi Party office said that "Whenever bomb blasts take place, Muslims and particularly youths are picked up-many innocents are booked for no fault of theirs. Police have ruined the lives of well-educated Muslim youth." An editorial in the right-of-center Urdu daily Inquilab in Mumbai called for a "high level enquiry committee to investigate into all bomb blasts throughout the length and breadth of India." Editorials in Marathi press Sakaal and Lokmat decried the alleged involvement of Hindu organizations as "shocking", saying "this is certainly bad news. It indicates the level of insecurity in a society scarred by terrorism. Terrorist outfits, Hindu or Muslim, are doing no good to anyone."

Hindu extremists' bomb-making improves

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17. (SBU) This is not the first incident in which Hindu extremists are accused of making bombs. In June of this year, extremists bombed a theater in Thane, outside of Mumbai, for featuring a play unflattering to Hindus. Little damage was done in that blast and Bal Thackeray, the fiery leader of the Shiv Sena party called on Hindus "to make better bombs" if they were to battle Muslims. (See reftel) In August, two former workers of the Hindu chauvinist group Bajrang Dal died in Kaunpur, Uttar Pradesh, allegedly when they were experimenting with explosives.

The explosive devices used in the 2008 Malegaon blast were more sophisticated than those used in the blast in Thane, early this year, according to RSO sources.

Impact of involvement of ex-military

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18. (SBU) The use of military grade RDX in the recent Malegaon bombings led ATS investigators to question military ties to the attacks. Media reports indicate that ATS is investigating links between the suspects and Bhonsala Military School which the Hindu extremist group Bajrang Dal had used for a training camp earlier this year to instill military culture in their members. Retired major Upadhyay purportedly taught at the school. Retired Major Prabhakar Kulkarni, commandant of the school, and former Major Y. D. Sahasrabuddhe, a teacher at the school, were also questioned in connection with the bombings, but only Major Upadhyay was charged. The police are also questioning an active army officer, Lt Colonel Prasad Purohit, with the cooperation of the Indian Army. Police claim to have evidence of phone conversations between Purohit and Upadhyay and Thakur.

19. (SBU) Comment: The prospect of various right-wing Hindu groups being identified with terrorism is giving the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh indigestion, as the party's theme in the state assembly elections next month of fighting terrorism may come back to bite its supporters. To keep a consistent mantra, the BJP has come out to condemn all acts of terrorism. Uma Bharati, former Chief Minister under the BJP in Madhya Pradesh and now one of its rivals, lambasted the BJP for "disowning" the sadhvi, Thakur, as BJP tried to distance itself from the violence. Bharati has offered Thakur a seat to run against the BJP in the Madhya Pradesh elections in November. After Bharati's criticism, the BJP later came out in favor of the sadhvi, arguing that she is innocent of the charges. While in the past, communal violence has resulted in the favoring of the BJP at the polls, having terrorists affiliated with the BJP's allies in the Sangh Parivar family of Hindu groups, may backfire with the general electorate.

MUMBAI 00000518 003 OF 003

10. (SBU) The rising sophistication of Hindu-made bombs, and the military's lack of control over its explosives are causing concern among police. Director General of Police for Maharashtra, A.N. Roy recently told CG Folmsbee that he is concerned about the increasing level of violence carried out by Hindu extremists. End Comment.  
FOLMSBEE